

HISTORY OF EXISTING STRUCTURES

3.2.6 PROSPERE HALL

At a meeting of the Board of Trustees of Jefferson College on 7 May 1930, Major Reed D. Walser, Superintendent,¹ made a report to the Board, urging that a separate dormitory for younger boys be constructed and providing a proposed plan and cost estimate that had been prepared by R.E. Bost. The Board directed the property committee to investigate the matter and make recommendations.² On 15 July 1930, the property committee reported that the plans proposed by Bost “were not deemed practicable,” and suggested a completely different plan proposed by William Stietenroth. The Board was concerned that the College could not afford either plan, and referred the matter back to the property committee.³ The matter of a separate dormitory for younger boys was again considered on 13 March 1931 by the Board, which adopted the following resolution: “Be it resolved, that it is the sense of the Board that in order to keep the College in operation, it is necessary that a new dormitory building be constructed for the use of the younger students, and that essential repairs be made upon the buildings already constructed, and that the matter again be referred to the building committee with instructions to procure proper plans and specifications and estimate of costs of erection and repairs, and to report at an early meeting of the Board for further instructions.”⁴

On 10 April 1931, “The building committee reported that they had Mr. Bost to prepare plans and specifications for the building, which was then submitted to the board, and Mr. Bost made the necessary explanations of the same.” The Board approved the plans and asked for bids to be submitted by 27 April 1931.⁵ On that date the Board met again and considered the bids that had been submitted, which are listed here:

B.G. Newman	9725.66
W.M. Stietenroth ⁶	9159.00
H.B. Brown	8850.00
Charles T. Brasfield	8482.50
Reed Brothers	8360.00
R.E. Bost	8325.00

¹ Major Reed D. Walser (1892-1951) served as Superintendent of Jefferson College for twenty-one years, from May 1926 until June 1947. He was the brother of Col. Clarence G. Prospere’s wife, Bertie Walser Prospere (1881-1966). Mrs. Prospere had continued the administration of the school after her husband’s death, and, with the consent of the Board, had asked her brother to come to Jefferson College and help her. The dates of Major Walser’s tenure as superintendent are from a list of the Superintendents of Jefferson Military College filed in the MDAH Subject File folder, Jefferson College, History of.

² Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Volume 9, (filed in Box 9 of an unprocessed accretion to the Jefferson Military College Papers, Z/U/1994.034), page 186.

³ Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Volume 9, page 187.

⁴ Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Volume 9, page 190.

⁵ Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Volume 9, page 191. There is a record of payment to R.E. Bost, dated 22 July 1931, for plans and specifications and for services as supervising architect, on page 231 of the Day Book, 1908-1935 in Box 4 of an unprocessed accretion to the Jefferson Military College Papers, Z/U/1990.034.

⁶ It seems likely that the original proposal was signed “Wm.” Stietenroth, and that this was incorrectly transcribed.

The Board selected the bid of F.A. Ketteringham.⁸

Frank Addison (F.A.) Ketteringham was a nephew of W.K. Ketteringham, Sr., and a first cousin of Matilda Elizabeth Ketteringham Murray, the wife of P.L. Murray (who built the Gymnasium in 1895).⁹ Frank Ketteringham is listed in the 1930 census as a 63-year-old building contractor residing in Natchez.

There is no specific statement in the Minutes of the Board about when the new dormitory was completed, but on 3 September 1931 the Treasurer reported that he had purchased insurance for the building, which suggests that it had been completed and accepted by the Board by that date.¹⁰

The building was named Prospere Hall in honor of Col. Clarence Greene Prospere, who served as Superintendent from 24 August 1917 until he was killed in an accident on campus on 21 March 1926.¹¹

Jefferson College closed in 1964, and not long afterward its buildings and grounds were conveyed to the State of Mississippi in exchange for paying off the institution's debts.¹² The property was initially placed under the management of the Mississippi State Building Commission, which, having no use for the property, simply boarded up the buildings and abandoned them. For a period of seven years the unattended buildings were subjected to extensive theft and vandalism.¹³

Initial plans for the preservation of Jefferson College as a state-managed historic site made no provisions for the preservation or even the retention of the twentieth-century buildings, which were considered to have no historical or architectural value. A report presented to a meeting of the Mississippi State Building Commission on 14 October 1970, by Mrs. R.L. Schuchs, chairman of the Jefferson Military Academy Historical Committee, proposed an "architectural restoration, professionally performed, according to National Park Service standards" of the older buildings, but recommended not only tearing down the "center section of main building" [i.e. the Gymnasium] but also tearing down the "existing 20th century dormitory buildings" as well.¹⁴

⁷ Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Volume 9, page 193.

⁸ Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Volume 9, page 193.

⁹ Genealogical information found on the Ancestry.com web site in August 2011.

¹⁰ Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Volume 9, page 197.

¹¹ The dates of his tenure as superintendent are from a list of the Superintendents of Jefferson Military College filed in the MDAH Subject File folder, **Jefferson College, History of**.

¹² Blain, *Education in the Old Southwest* (1976), p. 132.

¹³ The abandoned and deteriorating condition of the property can be seen in numerous photographs accompanying an article, "Jeff Academy's Fate: State Park or Ruins?" that appeared in the *Clarion Ledger* (Jackson, Miss.), 20 October 1968. A xerographic copy of the article is filed in the Subject File, **Jefferson College: Preservation and Restoration, 1964-1972**.

¹⁴ Outline of a report titled "For Presentation to the Mississippi State Building Commission," dated 14 October 1970, no author cited. A xerographic copy is filed in the Subject File, **Jefferson College: Preservation and Restoration, 1964-1972**. The presentation and the outline of the report are recorded in the Minutes of the State Building Commission, Book 28, pp. 740-743.

In August 1971 the Jefferson College property was placed under the administration of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH). One of the first actions taken by MDAH regarding Jefferson College was to arrange for the older buildings to be examined by noted preservation architect Charles E. Peterson of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Peterson made a visit to Jefferson College on 15 December 1971 to assess the condition of its older buildings and make recommendations for their preservation. His recommendations were written in a report, dated 21 January 1972.¹⁵ Peterson's report makes no mention of Raymond Hall, Prospere Hall, or Carpenter Hall, which were evidently all considered to be of no historical interest. His only reference to their existence is a recommendation that quarters should be provided "in one of the modern buildings so that an employee will be on the place at night."¹⁶

When the major restoration work was done on the East Wing, West Wing, and kitchen buildings between 1975 and 1977, Prospere Hall was renovated for use as offices and an exhibit area for Historic Jefferson College. This work was done by the Carter and Mullings Construction Company under the direction of architect Fred Wagner. Working drawings for the renovation of Prospere Hall are included in the 85-sheet set of architectural drawings for the restoration work that was done from 1975 to 1977. This complete set of working drawings, dated 1 April 1975, is filed in Official Records Series 1764, Box 6525 [Restricted]. It appears, however, that much of the proposed renovation of Prospere Hall was not done as originally planned. The actual alterations to the building were much less extensive than what is shown on the architectural drawings.

In the Mississippi Landmark file for Jefferson College is a Mississippi Landmark permit, dated 14 December 1999, for work at Historic Jefferson College which would include new wood shingle roofs on the West Wing and the West Kitchen, a new handicapped restroom in the Visitor's Center (Prospere Hall), and painting the exterior woodwork on the East Wing, West Wing, and kitchen buildings. The work was to be performed under the direction of Johnny Waycaster, AIA, of Waycaster & Associates, Architects, of Natchez.

On 19 November 2001 a Mississippi Landmark permit was issued for the installation of a memorial brick walkway at Prospere Hall. Another permit was issued on 8 August 2006, for the installation of a handicapped access ramp at the Visitors' Center (Prospere Hall). Prospere Hall currently houses the museum and administrative offices for Historic Jefferson College.

¹⁵ This report is currently filed (inappropriately) in Official Records Series 125, the "Education in the Old South West": Editors' Files, 1972-1976, in a folder labeled "A memorandum on Jefferson College, Washington, MS, 1971-72."

¹⁶ Charles E. Peterson, report on his visit to Jefferson College, dated 21 January 1972, page 3, filed, at present, in Official Records Series 125.